

Are Wanderers too dependent on John Delaney?

Wycombe Wanderers 2, Wealdstone 2

THE question is in the heading. The answer, somewhat regrettably, was confirmed at Loakes Park on Tuesday night, as Wealdstone retrieved their fading 'bogey' image with two late point-saving goals.

Let the facts account for themselves. Twice now Delaney has left the field before the end—the first occasion was against Wimbledon — and twice Wycombe's unwavering defence has looked noticeably less cohesive.

On Tuesday, a kick in the mouth during his goalmouth tussle with the 'Stone's evergreen Dave Swain, put Delaney out of action after just 17 minutes.

CONVINCING

He left the field with Wanderers already a goal ahead and beginning to convince a sizeable crowd that they had the beating of their old rivals.

And, unquestionably, with him a tower of strength in their backline, they did. Not so, however, following his exit.

Admittedly, Wycombe spent the major part of the evening on top—it was 2-0 soon after the interval, and three-quarters of the way to full time before Wealdstone fought themselves back into the reckoning—but their authority definitely lacked that little extra.

Although it is always unsettling to switch positions in mid-game, the makeshift pairing read Ian Rundle and Julian Lailey — last season's highly competent centre of defence.

Perhaps the mere presence of Delaney is becoming just a bit too invaluable to Wanderers' plan.

The Wycombe rearguard had undergone a slight reshuffle from the Bromley game, as Barry Baker was recalled to midfield and the ever-efficient Lailey fell back to displace Charlie Gale at left back.

Ken Ward stood by as substitute, but didn't have long to wait for his Isthmian League baptism, even if he did come in out of position in the number three berth, while Lailey moved inside to partner Rundle following Delaney's mishap.

WYCOMBE ELATION

Only three minutes earlier, on 14 minutes, Delaney had been the cause of Wycombe elation, transferring one of Len Worley's free kick specials into the net off his head, after Tony Horseman had been up-ended while racing menacingly towards goal.

Wanderers loosed some furious attacking movements in their efforts to increase the advantage by half-time.

Worley set the cat firmly among the pigeons, crossing inside off the right to throw the Wealdstone area into confusion. The ball neared its target twice before being cleared.

After 32 minutes, Tony Horseman, maintaining his new-found but wondrous work-rate, shot over-enthusiastically to balloon a good chance, and Geoff Anthony went menacingly close two minutes later.

NEAR THING

John Maskell was called upon to touch a narrow-angled Keith Searle effort across the goalface for a corner, but, despite Viv Busby missing a 'sitter' early in the second period, Wanderers went two up at 51 minutes.

The goal, made by a Horseman delivery from the left, was allowed through by Busby, eventually to be credited to Anthony, as the visiting defence was caught wide open.

Young Alan Thomas, the 'Stone's new signing from Fulham, deputising in goal for holidaying Andy Williams, was fortunate to take the ricochet off a Busby close-range shot, off full back Sedgley.

But the same 'keeper did well to cover Baker's 25-yarder in the 62nd minute.

The turning-point arrived with the substitution of the more experienced Johnny Hutchinson for 'Benny' Mitchell on the Wealdstone left wing three minutes later.

After the lapse of a further three minutes, Searle broke Marshall's 'shut-out' of 158 Isthmian

League minutes', heading in a Sedgley centre.

COMPLEXION

At 70 minutes, the complexion of the game turned bright red, with the equalising goal of Dave Swain from in front of the net.

Suddenly forced to cling to a point, the switch in emphasis was made all the more unfortunate by the absence of Ward from the field at the time—to set straight a wandering contact lens inside his left eye.

Petty, and sometimes not so petty, fouls often spoiled an otherwise entertaining duel between the teams technically lying top and second in the table after the first set of results.

Denny Montague received a fully-deserved 'booking' 15 minutes from time after bringing down Worley as he went darting through on the right flank.

Wycombe: J. Maskell; L. Temel, J. Lailey; I. Rundle, J. Delaney (sub.: K. Ward), R. Hatt; L. Worley, B. Baker, V. Busby, A. Horseman, G. Anthony.

Wealdstone: A. Thomas; G. Sedgley, D. Leonard; D. Montague, D. Bullock, J. Draper; B. Bremer, H. Lindsay, K. Searle, D. Swain, B. Mitchell (sub.: J. Hutchinson).